(as performed April 28-30, 1995)

"One of the Few"

by

Patricia H. Lin

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With all thanks to St. Andrews College & the Highland Players for a remarkable job well done! I am truly indebted to you all - for your support of my work, and for a wonderful performance.

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"One of the Few": A Synopsis

"One of the Few" is a play about two women...one a Polish Jewess who finds herself, inadvertently, on "the other side of the Wall", and the other, her reluctant rescuer, a Polish Catholic housewife. Most of the action takes place in Nazi-occupied Poland between the years 1943 and 1944.

Lech Celka finds his good friend, Marek, a police sergeant, arriving at Lech's home with a young woman in tow. It seems, Marek has spirited the woman, Renata, a Jewess whom he barely knows, out of the clutches of the German Order Police. It was an impulsive act, but now that he has rescued her, he doesn't exactly know what to do with her. He asks Lech to let her stay, for one night only, with him and his wife, Krystyna. As an act of political defiance, and despite anti-Semitic leanings, Lech agrees.

Krystyna returns with their baby and is presented to "Marek's woman". She assumes this to mean his "girl friend" of questionable morals. After Lech and Marek have both left to go about their respective businesses, Krystyna realizes that Renata is worse than a woman of loose morals...she is a Jew. For a Pole to give aid to a Jew is those times was an offense punishable by death.

Not particularly fond of Jews, either, she feels obliged to accommodate the "house guest". Her husband has promised as much.

Unable to secure housing for Renata, Marek prevails upon the Celkas to keep her longer. They agree, reluctantly.

One night's lodging becomes an extended stay. A bond develops between the women as they share housework, and the responsibility of caring for Krystyna's infant son, Aleksander.

Despite her husband's opposition, Krystyna comes to believe that Renata must survive the war, and that it is Krystyna's mission, as well as her destiny to facilitate that. Someone with credibility has to be able to tell the next generation (meaning Aleksander) what happened...that there were a few Poles who tried to help.

Lech insists Renata leave. When Krystyna refuses to allow that, he abandons his wife. Marek is killed, a neighbor, Captain Sendlack, chronically intrudes, as all the while, the two women devise ways to survive...for themselves, and for the baby.

Ultimately, Krystyna takes full responsibility for implementing a plan by which Renata and the baby will be assured time to make good their escape. In this manner, this unlikely heroine fulfills her mission, as well as her destiny. She becomes one of the few Poles to save a Jewish life.

Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

OLD RENATA:
An elderly Holocaust survivor. She acts as the "narrator" for her own story...of what happened when she was a young woman.

RENATA:
A Polish Jewess and OLD RENATA's younger counterpart. A dressmaker by trade, she lost her husband and young son to the horrors of the occupation. Street-wise, with a certain amount of business experience, and pretty. She is twenty nine years old.

LECH CELKA:
The son of landed-gentry, he has seen his family's wealth confiscated by the occupying forces. He longs for his pre-war care-free days, despite the fact that he is now married, and the father a newborn son. He owns a warehouse, and makes deliveries both for profit, and for the Polish Resistance. Anti-Semitic, and not too bright, he is around thirty.

POLICE SERGEANT MAREK:
LECH's boyhood friend, and a Polish Policeman. A good looking bachelor and politically powerful, he is also an idealist, and a leader in the Polish Resistance. He is around thirty.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT:
A reserve volunteer policeman with the German Order Police battalion occupying Warsaw. Forty-ish. He has had enough of the war, and can't wait to finish serving out his term so that he can get back to his home, and to civilian life.

KRYSTYNA CELKA:
A Polish housewife. A country girl who feels displaced and utterly alone in Warsaw, especially since her marriage has soured. Culturally indoctrinated to be anti-Semitic, deeply religious, and on all other counts extremely ordinary, she devotes herself to raising her newborn, Aleksander. She possesses neither street sense, nor work experience, nor survival skills. She is in her early twenties. She is very pretty.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK:
An pensioner and a widow, this former cavalry officer is the Celka's nosy neighbor, and an inveterate gossip. In his sixties.

FATHER GREGORY:
A Catholic priest. The head of the largest parish in Warsaw.

(Act One. Scene One.)

(The action of the play takes place inside of, and on the street in front of 21 Marszalkowska Street...an apartment house located in a middle class neighborhood of Warsaw.)

(The apartment house is presented structurally on stage by means of a large raised playing space which is LECH and KRYSTYNA's apartment. This space is divided into three areas, the living room, a small kitchen alcove, and a bedroom. The bedroom contains a free standing wardrobe. There is a "window" in the living room, from which one can look out onto the street. Hanging on the wall is a shrine to the Virgin Mary. There are candles in front of it.)

(There is a hallway passage which leads to stairs, and to the "front door" of the building.)

(MR. SENDLACK's apartment is located on the first floor, near the bottom of the stairs. It has a door which can be used to access the common hallway.)

(OLD RENATA enters from the wings. She is ill-at-ease. She clears her throat, and addresses the audience directly.)

OLD RENATA

Hello? Hello? Can you all hear me? Even way in the back? Good. You see, I'm not used to public speaking. Speaking in public, that is. So, if I'm a little unsteady...you'll forgive?

My name is Renata, and I'm a Holocaust survivor. But the reason I'm here tonight is to tell you about Krystyna. Krystyna Celka, the woman who's responsible for my being here at all.

My story happened a long time ago...back when I was young. Twenty nine, to be exact...the perfect age for men to be, and women to stay. But I digress. There...

(She indicates the platform-like structure.)

...is where most things took place. 21 Marszalkowska Street. A "good" address, on the Aryan side of the wall, naturally. In

Warsaw. Poland. Nazi-Occupied Poland. 1943.

(She scrutinizes the set.)

Not a bad looking facade, either...as facades go. Although, to tell the truth, I never thought the address was quite as "swell" as Krystyna made it out to be.

(The lights come up on the apartment. LECH is standing at the window, looking down on the street.)

That's Krystyna's husband up in the apartment, now...looking out of the window. Lech Celka. (Pause) Hm. I don't see Krystyna there with him. She must be outside. With the baby.

(On stage level, and off to one side of the building, MAREK enters, on patrol. He is dressed in the blue uniform of the Polish police. He stops in front of the building and lights a cigarette.)

Oh, and that fellow over there? That's Police Sergeant Marek. He was part of the Polish police force...the "Blue Police" is how we used to call them.

(MAREK crumples the cigarette package, and lets it fall to the ground. He exits. LECH comes downstairs, retrieves the crumpled packet, and returns upstairs.)

The two of them were involved with the...uh, the Resistance. But then again, who wasn't? Only that story, the one about the "Underground", isn't the one I've come here to talk about.

(MAREK enters, escorting RENATA. She wears a heavy coat and a scarf. The scarf partly covers her face.)

(As they approach, LECH, who, once again has been watching out the apartment window, comes downstairs to let them into the building.)

My story begins the first time I found myself on Marszalkowska Street. On March 22nd. A day so clear, so cold that the very air pierced you to the quick. (Indicating RENATA) That's me, over there. So numb. So frightened!

(LECH admits them to the apartment house. He and MAREK go up the stairs to the Celka apartment. RENATA follows close behind.)

Lech
So...who's the...uh...?

MAREK
Don't ask.

LECH
Here we are.

(They enter the apartment area.)

MAREK
Um! Something smells good!

LECH
(With pride) Krystyna's doing.

MAREK
Lucky man!

LECH
No question!

(LECH hangs up his coat and MAREK's.)

(To RENATA) Can I take your coat, Miss?

RENATA
No. I'll keep it.

LECH
Suit yourself. At least, sit down?

(RENATA sits.)

Damn bitter out there, even for March!

(RENATA nods agreement.)

Hey, Marek! What do you think you're doing?

MAREK
Looking for your good stuff.

LECH
Krystyna hid it.

MAREK
Where?

LECH

(Amused) In the kitchen. Lower left cabinet.

(MAREK goes into the kitchen.)

Well, since the bar seems to be open early...how about you, Miss? A little vodka? Or perhaps some sherry?

RENATA
(Shaking her head) No. I really don't...

LECH
No problem. For most of us, it is too early. Only you'll have to excuse me. Our mutual friend out there consumes obsessively, given half the chance!

(LECH joins MAREK in the kitchen.)

O.K., pal. Who the Hell is she?

MAREK
Someone I...picked up.

LECH
On the street?

MAREK
On patrol.

LECH
Well, she is pretty, I'll give you that. At least what I can see behind her scarf looks appealing.

MAREK
(Downing his drink) Celka! You're married.

LECH
Doesn't mean I can't still appreciate...although, I must say, I don't think I've ever seen her around before. Does she have a name?

MAREK
Probably.

LECH
(Laughing) Which you don't even...! And I thought I was the cad!

MAREK
Listen, Celka, I need a favor. And she needs a place to stay.

LECH
What's wrong with her place?

MAREK

Not good.

LECH

Why?

MAREK

Don't ask.

LECH

Wait a minute! (Thinking) You met her "on patrol"...And your beat is the Ghetto. (Aghast) Marek, she's not...! Or is she?

(He gets pours a glass of water, and returns to give it to RENATA. He stares at her as he speaks.)

Miss? Some water?

(RENATA turns her head away as she shakes her head "no".)

Oh, but I insist.

(RENATA takes the water. She does not look at LECH directly. LECH returns to the kitchen. He is angry, but speaks in a low voice so as not to be overheard.)

What the Hell do you mean, bringing a Jew into my house?

MAREK

Who says she's...

LECH

The way she turns her head? The way she can't look you in the eye?

MAREK

Celka, my oldest and dearest friend! I need your help.

LECH

With all your "connections", I'm the only one you can ask? Or I'm the only one stupid enough to risk my neck in a noose!

MAREK

Lech, what can I say? I trust you more than any ten of my so-called "connections". Besides, I'm only asking this favor for the one night. Just until I can find her someplace...more permanent.

LECH

But you know the penalty. You help...them, you sign your own death warrant.

MAREK

Lech! Please?

LECH

No. Use your own house.

MAREK

I can't. There are too many over there as it is.

LECH

Not more...!

MAREK

No. Relatives! (Pause) Uninvited relations. It happens, when all the large housing gets requisitioned.

LECH

My condolences, but it changes nothing.

MAREK

Celka! I can't just give her back! I won't give the Germans that satisfaction!

LECH

Oho! So, we're talking about an act of political defiance?

MAREK

I...can't explain. I'd like to, but I'm not at liberty...

LECH

(Interested) Home Army business?

(MAREK downs another drink.)

MAREK

I've said too much as it is.

LECH

Because, Hell, if this is for the Home Army...

MAREK

This is for me, for our Home Army, for our government in exile...

LECH

(Reluctant) Well...in that case, I'll have to grit my teeth and go along, won't I? (Pause) But for one night only.

MAREK

I knew I could count on you. (to RENATA) I'll be back, first thing in the morning. You understand?

(RENATA nods "yes".)

(to LECH) O.K. I'm at the precinct, if you need me...for anything.

(MAREK exits.)

(From a distance LECH scrutinizes RENATA.)

LECH
So...you know any Polish beyond "yes", "no", and "thank you"?

(RENATA nods.)

Speak up!

RENATA
I...speak Polish. Also German. And a little Russian.

LECH
Got no use for either of those last two! Not in this household!

(RENATA hangs her head.)

You got a kennkarte? An identity card?

(RENATA produces one from her purse.)

Hm. "Danuta Nowak". From Wieliczka. (Examining it) A forgery. But a good one.

(He hands the card back to her.)

So, what's your name? Your <u>real</u> name?

(She doesn't answer.)

Hey! You answer when I talk to you!

RENATA
Renata. My name is Renata.

LECH
And take that scarf off.

(She unwraps the scarf slowly.)

(Mumbling to himself) Christ! what some people will do for their country! (Pause) And stop looking at me with those "sad eyes"? Sad eyes are a giveaway! Sad eyes, and the stink of garlic. And onions!

(RENATA hangs her head in shame.)

Celka, you are such a fool! And Marek, you are going to owe me big

for this...and I am going to collect! Make no mistake about that, my friend!

(LECH gets a drink from the kitchen, and downs it. He ignores RENATA, who watches him nervously.)

(While this action is going on in the apartment, KRYSTYNA enters on the street level. She is pushing a baby carriage, maneuvering it inside the building, and up the stairs. She enters the apartment as LECH puts the liquor away, and his glass in the sink.)

KRYSTYNA
Lech? We're back! It was far too windy in the park for the baby... even with the sun.

LECH
Here. Let me.

(He "parks" the carriage in a convenient spot.)

KRYSTYNA
(A little surprised) Why...thank you.

LECH
We have a guest. A friend of Marek's.

KRYSTYNA
Oh. But, Kochanie, what kind of host are you, that you don't take someone's coat?

RENATA
I prefer to keep it, Ma'am. I'm chilly.

KRYSTYNA
It is cold. Lech? Turn up the radiator?

(She puts the baby down, as he adjusts the radiator.)

LECH
There. Uh...Krystyna, I have to get back to the warehouse.

(He puts on his coat, and moves to leave.)

KRYSTYNA
What about dinner?

LECH
Don't wait. My deliveries are so backed up.

KRYSTYNA
That means you'll be late?

LECH
Most likely.

KRYSTYNA
Again?

LECH
(Measured) I'll get back when I can.

(He goes to the baby carriage, picks up the baby, and kisses him.)

KRYSTYNA
(Cowed) Sorry. (Pause) Only Dear? Be careful? Captain Sendlack told me there was a street sweep this morning. Over near Praga.

LECH
Praga's a slum. Just a lot of lowlife...and gypsies. Best place in the world for the Jackboots to round up their work details!

KRYSTYNA
Still, it scares me when I hear such talk.

LECH
Then stop listening to the old fart! You know Sendlack talks just to hear himself make noise!

KRYSTYNA
I can't help it. I worry.

LECH
Hey, it's my job to do the worrying for this family! Now, isn't that right?

(He kisses her.)

Oh, by the way, Marek's woman will be staying the night.

KRYSTYNA
His...woman? Lech, you know how I feel about loose women...

LECH
Oh, for Christ's sake, Krystyna!

KRYSTYNA
And please, don't use the Lord's name...!

LECH
You're right. You're right, Dear. I apologize. Only it's not like Marek's doing anything wrong. I mean, Hell, the man's a bachelor.

KRYSTYNA
I know he is. But I also know how I feel inside...when I'm asked to entertain his conquests. Especially when he's not even here.

LECH
I doubt this one's a conquest.

KRYSTYNA
Then why...?

LECH
Because.

KRYSTYNA
But...

LECH
Krystyna, she has to stay, and that's all there is to it. I promised.

KRYSTYNA
Just where in the world am I supposed to put her?

LECH
On the couch? Under the bed? I'm sure you can think of someplace.

KRYSTYNA
Be serious.

LECH
I am. Now then, I'll see you and the baby later. You take good care of our, uh...house guest, you hear?

(He exits.)

(KRYSTYNA looks after LECH in surprise, and confusion. She shakes her head, and attends to her business, looking after the baby first, and later, unpacking a string bag full of groceries.)

KRYSTYNA
(Curtly to RENATA) I'll be with you, as soon as I put these things away.

RENATA
Can I help? With anything?

KRYSTYNA
No.

RENATA
(Referring to some knitting in progress on the sofa) I...see you're knitting "small things".

KRYSTYNA
Mittens. For the parish needy.

RENATA
It takes a good woman to be so charitable.

KRYSTYNA
It's a duty. It's how I was raised.

RENATA
It's how I was raised, too.

KRYSTYNA
Of...course.

RENATA
(Pause) Where'd you get the wool?

KRYSTYNA
I took apart an old sweater. It had holes.

RENATA
Cashmere?

KRYSTYNA
Yes.

RENATA
(Rubbing it against her face) I haven't felt something this soft since...

KRYSTYNA
Knitting is a proper past time, you know. For a lady.

RENATA
Yes, I do know. A productive activity for when your husband's away ...or while your baby's asleep.

KRYSTYNA
Why, yes. Exactly.

RENATA
So tell me...how old is the little one?

KRYSTYNA

Two months yesterday.

RENATA

May I look?

KRYSTYNA

As long as you don't wake him.

RENATA

(Pause) He's beautiful.

(KRYSTYNA knocks on wood.)

KRYSTYNA

He's my angel.

(RENATA remains at the side of the cradle admiring the baby. KRYSTYNA continues to put away groceries.)

What's your name, anyway?

RENATA

Renata.

KRYSTYNA

You seem different from Marek's other lady-friends. Thank God!

(She holds a hand over the radiator.)

Oh, good! The heat seems to be coming up! Well? Take off your coat! No need to stay bundled.

RENATA

I really don't prefer...

KRYSTYNA

Oh, but I insist.

RENATA

Really?

KRYSTYNA

Absolutely!

RENATA

Well, if that's how things have to be...

(RENATA takes off her coat, and crosses to the coat rack, which is near the baby's cradle. As she hangs it up, KRYSTYNA notices that RENATA is wearing a white arm band with a blue star of

David embossed on it.)

(Horrified) Holy Mother of God!

RENATA
I'm sorry! Look, I know there's no arm band showing on my overcoat! But that's because the policeman tore it off! I swear, it was the policeman's doing!

KRYSTYNA
You're...!

RENATA
I can make myself another one...quick as a wink...

KRYSTYNA
...Jewish?

RENATA
...if that would make you more comfortable.

KRYSTYNA
You...you get away from my baby!

RENATA
"Comfortable" is out of the question, right?

(RENATA puts her coat back on quickly.)

Then, I'll be going.

(She starts to exit.)

KRYSTYNA
Lord, Jesus, no! You can't leave!

RENATA
(Confused) I can't?

(KRYSTYNA rushes over to block her exit.)

KRYSTYNA
No! You can't! You have to stay! Don't you understand? My husband promised. He promised "police"!

(The focus shifts back to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
At that point, I should have just continued on out the door. But I didn't...for all the wrong...or maybe it was all the right reasons. Who's to say? I didn't know this part of the city, I was exhausted. I was terrified of being found out on the street. Alone. After

dark.

(RENATA takes off her coat and starts to sit down on the sofa. KRYSTYNA stops her from doing so until she has gotten a sheet from the closet and spread it out for RENATA to sit on.)

(KRYSTYNA then grabs the baby from the crib, and takes him into the bedroom with her. She shuts the bedroom door.)

(RENATA covers herself with her coat and curls up on the sofa, in a sitting position as she tries to sleep.)

(End of Scene)

(Scene Two. The apartment. The next morning.)

(KRYSTYNA enters from the bedroom area, carrying a broom. RENATA has slumped sideways on the sofa...asleep. KRYSTYNA prods her with the broom, waking her.)

KRYSTYNA
All right! All right, lazybones!

RENATA
Huh? What the...?

KRYSTYNA
I want you packed and ready to go the minute Marek walks through that door!

RENATA
What time is it?

KRYSTYNA
Late. (Pause) Well, what are you waiting for? Go ahead. Do whatever you need to prepare yourself.

(RENATA sits up and "combs" her hair.)

RENATA
That's it.

KRYSTYNA
That's all?

RENATA
What's to prepare? I came in here with the clothes on my back. I'll leave the same way.

KRYSTYNA
Fine. Stand up.

(RENATA does. KRYSTYNA begins to re-fold the sheet.)

(Curious despite herself) Where...do you think you'll be going? Once you leave here, that is.

RENATA
I have absolutely no idea.

KRYSTYNA

You don't?

RENATA

Just like I have no idea what it is I'm going to do, whenever it is that I get to where ever it is that I'm going. Assuming, that is, that I even get to anyplace at all.

(The sheet folded, she puts it on a straight backed chair.)

KRYSTYNA

You can sit, now.

(RENATA does.)

I suppose things can be uncertain for someone like you...who finds herself in this kind of, uh...

RENATA

Situation?

KRYSTYNA

Yes.

RENATA

My situation is what it is.

KRYSTYNA

I wouldn't know.

RENATA

Yes, Ma'am.

KRYSTYNA

(Embarrassed) Well, at least, you've managed to have Marek looking out for you.

RENATA

Who?

KRYSTYNA

The policeman?

RENATA

Oh. Is that his name.

KRYSTYNA

You didn't know?

RENATA

Why should I know the man?

KRYSTYNA
(Incredulous) Then why in the world...?

RENATA
All I know is that, yesterday I was walking down Ulica Karmelica, and the next thing, the German Order Police were dragging me... pulling at my skirt...!

KRYSTYNA
I don't...really want to hear this.

RENATA
(In a rush of words) When, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, this blue coat reaches in, grabs me, and starts in on some cockamamie story...about how his police squad has been monitoring me for days! And how, therefore, he has first claim!

KRYSTYNA
True?

RENATA
It's what he said.

KRYSTYNA
(Suspicious) You really don't know the Sergeant?

RENATA
Well, maybe a little...by sight. I know he's in charge of a lot of the patrols. Inside the Wall.

KRYSTYNA
He simply spirited you away? On impulse?

RENATA
That's what happened.

KRYSTYNA
Then Marek must be your Guardian Angel! It's the only possible explanation.

RENATA
Yes, Ma'am. Whatever that means.

KRYSTYNA
Oh, it means that...

(There is the sound of church bells. KRYSTYNA stops her activity. She crosses herself, and begins to pray.)

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, Blessed art Thou among women, and

blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

(RENATA is confused...torn between bowing her head, and being totally uncomfortable and out of place.)

(The prayer finishes, and KRYSTYNA goes into the kitchen, and begins to slice bread.)

It means that everyone has a Guardian Angel...watching over them, protecting them. Leading them in the Ways of God.

RENATA
(Wary) Well, all right, Ma'am. If you say so.

KRYSTYNA
I do. (Pause) Hm...I wonder what can be keeping the Sergeant?

RENATA
(Checking her watch) It's barely nine.

KRYSTYNA
I know. The bells just rang. (Pause) Here. Have something to eat. No telling how long before you'll get another chance...

(KRYSTYNA hands her a slice of bread.)

RENATA
Thank you. I am hungry.

KRYSTYNA
At some point, Marek will take you back...to where you belong?

RENATA
To the Ghetto?

(She "spits", warding off the "evil eye".)

God forbid!

(KRYSTYNA notices the spit, but steels herself so as not to react to it.)

KRYSTYNA
You wouldn't be happier there?

(KRYSTYNA hands her the bread.)

RENATA
I...don't think so.

KRYSTYNA

You're laughing? At me?

RENATA
No. It's just a bizarre thought. "Happy". There.

KRYSTYNA
You don't have family to go back to?

RENATA
No.

(During the next sequence, KRYSTYNA takes up a rag, and looks to clean the floor where she thinks the spittle landed. Not finding any trace, she becomes confused and chagrinned.)

KRYSTYNA
But you wear a wedding band.

RENATA
My husband got sent off to the East. To work. And my child had his head blown off...trying to sneak food back over the Wall. From the outside.

KRYSTYNA
(Shocked) Goodness!

(KRYSTYNA moves toward RENATA in a reflex of compassion, but RENATA turns away, making it clear with a hand gesture that she wants to be alone with her pain. KRYSTYNA, is confused, and a little hurt, but she allows for this.)

(LECH and MAREK enter from offstage, and climb the steps to the apartment.)

MAREK
Just a little longer, Lech. Maybe a day or two...

LECH
Not so loud! These walls have ears!

MAREK
...and then, I'm sure to have someplace else worked out for her.

LECH
(Sotto) Marek, how many times do I have to tell you? This is not my problem!

KRYSTYNA
(Hating to disrupt RENATA's "pain", but doing it anyway) Renata? I hear them. On the stairs.

(The men enter the apartment.)

KRYSTYNA
(Kissing LECH) Kochanie.

LECH
Krystyna.

KRYSTYNA
Sergeant? I think you'll find your charge ready and waiting.

MAREK
Krystyna, I was just explaining to Lech why I need to impose on your hospitality a little more.

KRYSTYNA
(To LECH) You haven't agreed to this, have you?

LECH
Of course, I haven't.

MAREK
I was hoping that, if the three of us could talk things over...

KRYSTYNA
But neither Lech nor I want this to go on any longer than it absolutely has to. That's right, isn't it, Kochanie?

MAREK
It's just that finding her a secure place is very difficult.

KRYSTYNA
(Pulling LECH aside) She actually spit on my floor!

LECH
Look, Marek, I have a responsibility to my family. To their safety. Surely you can understand...

MAREK
Her safety is important, too. To me. To the cause.

KRYSTYNA
What cause?

MAREK
Ours. I tell you, if the German Order Police get hold of her, then the whole security of my network could be compromised.

(KRYSTYNA fearfully clutches the cross around her neck as she looks back and forth between the two men. She is clearly at a loss as to

what to do.)

(The focus shifts back to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
What he actually meant was that his personal security could have been compromised. (Pause) Like I had told Krystyna, I knew the Police Sergeant by sight. Actually, we both knew each other by sight... from work we did for our respective resistance groups. The difference was, before, he was a nameless face...a carrier of intelligence between one of the few Polish Units willing to help those of us locked inside. (Pause) Only after his impulsive action...and I never doubted that was exactly what it was...an unplanned event...this Pole had placed himself in grave danger. If I was caught, and turned over to the Order Police or worse...to their bosses, the Gestapo, I could have given him up. Especially now...since I knew his name, as well as his true identity.

KRYSTYNA
Kochanie? I mean, if this really is a matter of security...And if it's for Poland...then maybe we <u>should</u> reconsider.

LECH
No. No way am I inclined to shelter...

KRYSTYNA
I'm not inclined, either. But, under the circumstances, maybe we have to put our inclinations aside. I mean, isn't that how they were just talking, in church last Sunday? How we all have to make sacrifices...for our Freedom Fighters...for our country!

LECH
(Shutting her up) All right. All right. Enough!

(MAREK embraces first LECH, and then KRYSTYNA.)

MAREK
Poland thanks you, and I thank you! And I promise, if I hear of anything unusual...either through police channels, or otherwise...

LECH
...You'd better damn straight warn us!

MAREK
By all that's sacred! (Pause) Now then, we need to fix her a hiding place.

KRYSTYNA
Maybe in the bedroom? There's a wardrobe...

MAREK
Show me.

KRYSTYNA
Renata? Come along?

(All four enter the bedroom area.)

MAREK
Oh, yes! That will do fine! (Pause) Celka? Give a hand?

(The men adjust the position of the wardrobe.)

All right, then..."Renata", is it?

RENATA
Yes, Sir.

MAREK
See if you can slip in behind.

(RENATA tries out the hiding place.)

LECH
It'll work, if she doesn't breathe.

MAREK
Thank God some women have the bones of a cat.

KRYSTYNA
She won't have to stay squashed in there like that, all the time, will she?

MAREK
Of course not. Just when...<u>if</u> there's trouble.

LECH
As far as I'm concerned, she should just stay in there. Out of sight. Period.

KRYSTYNA
Marek?

MAREK
That's not very reasonable, now is it, Lech?

LECH
On the contrary. I think it's the most reasonable thing I've heard anyone say all day.

KRYSTYNA
No, it's not, Dear. You know how, when you have to kneel in church in one spot, for too long...how easy it is to pass out? Well, we certainly don't need that happening here, too, now? Do we?

(LECH registers his disgust, as he turns away from the discussion. By his body language, however, it is clear that he will not interfere with RENATA moving about.)

MAREK

Renata, you can come out.

(RENATA does.)

Only pay attention. I want you staying away from the windows. And no noise for the neighbors to hear.

LECH

(To RENATA) And take your shoes off. They clomp.

MAREK

He's right. It's best...safest, if no one even suspects you exist.

(RENATA gives up her shoes to KRYSTYNA. KRYSTYNA puts them inside the wardrobe.)

LECH

(Pause) So, are we done?

MAREK

I think so.

(The men return to the living room.)

LECH

Then, enough! Let's eat!

KRYSTYNA

Right away!

(She rushes into the kitchen.)

LECH

Marek? You hungry?

MAREK

If there's extra.

LECH

For you, my friend, always!

(The men sit, and KRYSTYNA brings out soup.)

Barszcz?

KRYSTYNA

Yes. With pierogi!

MAREK

Join us, Krystyna?

KRYSTYNA

I've already eaten. But, maybe I will sit with you for tea.

(She goes back into the kitchen for the tea.)

Renata? Something to drink?

RENATA

Please, Ma'am.

(KRYSTYNA gets teacups for four, and brings them to the table. She serves the men. She pours one for RENATA and hands it to her.)

KRYSTYNA

Here. Don't drop it.

(The doorbell rings.)

LECH

What the...?

(LECH motions for RENATA to hide.)

KRYSTYNA

I'll see who it is.

LECH

Not so fast!

(RENATA sets her cup on the table, and hides behind the wardrobe.)

O.K. Now answer it.

(KRYSTYNA opens the door. CAPTAIN SENDLACK enters.)

KRYSTYNA

Captain Sendlack! What...a surprise! Only what's wrong? You look awful!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

(Very upset) Mrs. Celka...Mr. Celka!

(He notices MAREK in the room.)

Oh, I'm sorry. You're entertaining.

KRYSTYNA
It's quite all right. Come in. Come in.

(He does.)

Do you know our good friend, Police Sergeant...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Ah, a police sergeant! Had you only been around when I could have used you!

MAREK
Why? What's happened?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I was sitting in the park...same bench I've been sitting on for the past ten years...just waiting for my daily checker game to show up. When the Huns came along and I got roused!

LECH
Why?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
So they could sit.

KRYSTYNA
Oh, the shame...!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Just because I'm old...

MAREK
More likely, because you're Polish.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
They have no right to treat me like dirt! After all, I fought in the war! My command even stormed Kiev...back in '20!

MAREK
It makes no difference, Captain. To them, you're a Pole. A second class citizen.

LECH
Second class citizen? Second class slave!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
An outrage! My family has been Polish for at least six generations, and I have the baptismal certificates to prove it!

KRYSTYNA
Captain! Captain! Calm down!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I killed Bolsheviks during the war! Those Germans should be thanking me...not telling me to move on! By the way, did I mention I was involved in the Russian campaign?

MAREK
Yes. You did.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
A Captain in the horse brigade! Under Pilsudski. Now there was a leader!

KRYSTYNA
(Interrupting) Captain? A cup of tea?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Oh, why, thank you, my dear. (Calming himself) A lovely wife, you have, Mr. Celka. A lovely wife, indeed.

LECH
Thank you, Captain.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Much like my dear departed Gloria. A lady of breeding, and quite beautiful, too. Just like your darling...(Pause) Hm, that's strange.

KRYSTYNA
What is?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
There are four teacups set out already. And filled. Yet there are only the three of you at table. Is someone else...?

KRYSTYNA
No! Not at all! (Grabbing up RENATA's teacup) This cup has a hairline crack! Only I poured it full before I realized! I was just replacing it with a fresh one. Just before you came in.

(She moves into the kitchen where she makes a show of getting a new cup from the cupboard. She returns to the table.)

Sugar?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You still have some?

LECH

(Shoving the sugar bowl towards him) Here.

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK makes a pig of himself by putting many spoons of sugar into his tea.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Forty years of service, and the pitiful pension they give me...<u>when</u> they give me...! Oh, I tell you, it's enough to make you sick! No respect what-so-ever! Now, back when I had my command...under Pilsudski...!

(Focus shifts back to OLD RENATA as lights come down on the dining room. LECH and MAREK exit.)

OLD RENATA

And so, the Captain would go on...for what seemed like hours, while I had to make like a sandwich...squashed between the wall and the back of the wardrobe! Not daring to cough, to scratch. God forbid, I should have to hiccup!

(End of Scene.)

(Scene Three. A few days later.)

(Lights up on CAPTAIN SENDLACK having tea with KRYSTYNA. She looks bored, but tolerant. RENATA is still in hiding behind the wardrobe.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
And so, after two months of shuttling from one clinic to the next, my Gloria, my poor wife of thirty years...succumbed.

KRYSTYNA
I'm sure that...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Not to a bad heart, mind you...although that was what everyone predicted would do her in...but to influenza!

KRYSTYNA
(Checking her watch) Captain Sendlack, I don't mean to be rude, but...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Of course, Of course, my dear Mrs. Celka. It seems I always overstay my visits! But then, that's hard not to...especially when I'm in the company of such a good listener!

KRYSTYNA
I'm glad to be of comfort.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
How many are the times when this old man's soul so desperately longs for a compassionate ear!

(KRYSTYNA stands up to show him out.)

KRYSTYNA
And I do thank you for bringing me the movie magazine.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
My pleasure, my pleasure! Now then, I'd better be beating, as we used to call it, a "French Retreat".

KRYSTYNA
Excuse me?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Giving her a wink) Well, it <u>is</u> almost time for <u>him</u> to arrive.

KRYSTYNA
What are you...?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Knowingly) Your Police Sergeant? Seems to me, I hear his boots on the landing...almost every afternoon around this time!

KRYSTYNA
Captain Sendlack, you are mistaken. Sergeant Marek is my baby's God Father! He stops by to pay his respects. Nothing more.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Come, my dear, I wasn't born yesterday. The sergeant is a very good looking young man. And powerful! Probably good for an extra ration coupon or two, eh?

KRYSTYNA
Captain Sendlack! By all that's holy...!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Don't worry, Mrs. Celka! Your little secret will be safe with me!

KRYSTYNA
But, I swear...!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Not that I blame you one bit! I hear you cry yourself to sleep more nights than not, while that husband of your's is out gallivanting.

KRYSTYNA
Captain!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Mrs. Celka, you have my complete understanding...and support. Now then...

(He salutes her in his best "cavalry manner".)

...I thank you for the refreshment. And for the company.

(With a flourish, CAPTAIN SENDLACK exits.)

KRYSTYNA
God in Heaven! That man actually believes...! But he can't! I mean, I haven't...! Blessed Virgin!

(KRYSTYNA kneels and prays.)

"Angel of God, my guardian dear...

(The rest of the prayer, as necessary, is mumbled, as RENATA comes out of hiding.)

To whom God's love commits me here.
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide.
Amen"

RENATA
Just who does that goyisher kop think he is?

KRYSTYNA
You...

RENATA
Overheard? Yes.

KRYSTYNA
If I could only let myself...

RENATA
Let yourself "what"?

KRYSTYNA
Hate that man!

RENATA
This is so difficult?

KRYSTYNA
To hate is a sin.

RENATA
It's a lot easier to forgive your enemies, after you've gotten even with them. Besides, that nudnick has no reason to think such things about you...let alone to say them out loud!

KRYSTYNA
No, he doesn't, does he.

RENATA
Although, under the circumstances, his, uh...imagination does work to your advantage.

KRYSTYNA
What?

RENATA
His fantasy? Doesn't it provide just the perfect "why" for the Sergeant's visits?

KRYSTYNA
This is not...funny.

RENATA
(Laughing) Oh, but it is! Think about it. If you got a zloty for every person who only believes exactly what he wants to, simply because that's how he wants to believe...why you could live like a queen!

KRYSTYNA
I don't want to live like a queen. I just want to live with my good name intact.

RENATA
Of course. (Pause) Only, what is it they say? If you can laugh at something, you can live with something! Although, from me, you probably don't want to hear such advice.

KRYSTYNA
Look, it's not as though I have anything against you, personally. It's just that...well, I've never had much to do with your kind. I mean, in my village, you Jews always kept to yourselves.

RENATA
I never had much to do with Catholics, either. Nothing, actually... if I could help it. You were always too scary.

KRYSTYNA
(Dumbfounded) You think I'm scary?

RENATA
(Defensive) Sometimes, Ma'am.

KRYSTYNA
But that's ridiculous! And stop calling me "Ma'am"! Makes me feel like I'm putting on airs. The name is "Krystyna". Plain and simple.

RENATA
Yes, Ma'am. Krystyna.

KRYSTYNA
I don't understand. Why are people always trying to make me into something I'm not.

RENATA
I really wasn't...

KRYSTYNA
Not you. Everyone else. I tell you, everything always gets so complicated. Here. For me.

RENATA
I don't follow.

KRYSTYNA

All the strange ways? All so different from where I'm used to.

RENATA
You're not from Warsaw?

KRYSTYNA
No. My husband's the city person. Me? I'm from Baniocha, near the mountains. Not that I'm exactly a country girl. I mean, the Celkas weren't the only family whose house had servants!

(The baby starts to fuss and to cry.)

Not again! (Putting on her sweet voice) Coming, Kochanie!

(KRYSTYNA changes the baby's diaper.)

RENATA
Krystyna? What kind of "strange ways" are you talking about?

KRYSTYNA
It's hard to explain. I mean, the truth is that I don't get out all that much...except, of course, to go to the market, and to take Aleksander for strolls. But, it just feels to me as if, here... everything's tolerated.

RENATA
By whom?

KRYSTYNA
My husband's friends.

RENATA
Not your favorite kind of people.

KRYSTYNA
They're terrible influences.

RENATA
What about your own? Friends, that is.

KRYSTYNA
Who has time? I have a baby, and a home, and...a husband.

RENATA
Oh. I get the picture.

(KRYSTYNA hands the dirty diaper to RENATA.)

KRYSTYNA
Put this in the pail for me?

RENATA

Sure. (Pause) You've really no relatives around?

KRYSTYNA
Three hours south. By train.

RENATA
In Baniocha.

(KRYSTYNA nods "yes".)

Krystyna...if it's not too personal...how in the world did you and Mr. Celka...?

KRYSTYNA
...Meet? Simple. The Celkas had a summer estate near our village. (To the baby) There, love! Now you must feel better! (Pause) Oh, just look at you! Sucking your thumb! Hungry again, am I right?

RENATA
So sweet, kinna hora.

(KRYSTYNA sits down to nurse the baby.)

KRYSTYNA
And such a beautiful place it was, too! Acres and acres...almost as far as the eye could see! And with some of the finest stables around! At least, that's how it was until the Germans...

RENATA
...Occupied?

(KRYSTYNA nods "yes".)

And took everything?

(KRYSTYNA nods "yes" again.)

It was the same with us. The Germans came, confiscated our tailor shop, and moved us lock stock and sewing machine, thirty five kilometers...to the Ghetto.

KRYSTYNA
Moving is hard. It can make you feel such a stranger...

RENATA
I know. In a strange land.

(KRYSTYNA glances up at RENATA. Their eyes lock for a split second, as they both understand that a connection has been made between them. The women look away from each other.)

KRYSTYNA
Why...yes.

RENATA
Goodness, but that little one surely has a thirst!

KRYSTYNA
He does, doesn't he!

RENATA
Lucky the man with his own private label!

KRYSTYNA
Renata!

(KRYSTYNA stifles an embarrassed laugh.)

RENATA
Go ahead and laugh, Krystyna. I swear, I won't tell!

KRYSTYNA
Not much to laugh about these days.

RENATA
Which is why we have to take every opportunity!

KRYSTYNA
Lech doesn't approve of my nursing, you know.

RENATA
He's jealous?

KRYSTYNA
No! He just thinks it isn't "modern". He says "city women" don't do it anymore.

RENATA
When it's best for the baby?

KRYSTYNA
He thinks it's bothersome...unsightly.

RENATA
(Simply) I nursed my little one. I thought it was a beautiful experience.

KRYSTYNA
It is a beautiful experience, isn't it? (Getting upset) And I'm not being stupid, am I?

RENATA
Of course not.

KRYSTYNA
Lech thinks I'm stupid. Stupid and provincial.

RENATA
Krystyna, don't let yourself get upset! Your milk won't flow.

KRYSTYNA
I can't help it. I get upset when I think about him!

RENATA
I get upset thinking about a lot of things...but sometimes you just have to control yourself.

KRYSTYNA
Could you control yourself, if...

(She stops in mid sentence, and wipes her eyes with a handkerchief.)

RENATA
"If" what?

KRYSTYNA
(Blurting it out) He smells of other women! (Pause) Blessed Virgin, I'm sorry! I'm sorry I said that out loud. And to her!

RENATA
Krystyna, relax, will you? I have this incredible ability. I can remember to forget every word I ever hear...and in any language I ever hear it in!

KRYSTYNA
He thinks he has a right.

RENATA
To indiscretions? Why?

KRYSTYNA
Because his friends do worse!

RENATA
Maybe you should have this "marriage" annulled, or whatever it is you Catholics do.

KRYSTYNA
When I have a baby? (Pause) No, Renata, I'm afraid that Lech Celka is just a cross I'm going to have to bear. For the rest of my natural life!

(Focus shifts back to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
It was about then I began to see how Krystyna Celka was as trapped and alone, and a prisoner in that apartment as I was! And that gave me the courage to laugh at us, at our pathetic circumstances...and to encourage her to do the same. And the more we laughed, together, the more comfortable I felt. I think it was the same for her.

KRYSTYNA
(Handing RENATA the baby) Renata? You'll put Aleksander down to sleep for me? I really need to get a quick nap in while I have the chance.

(RENATA takes the baby. KRYSTYNA exits to the bedroom.)

OLD RENATA
More and more I was allowed to sit on the furniture...to help out around the apartment...cleaning, mending clothes...which, by the way, I did very well. On occasions, like when rations were in, I'd be left completely in charge...so Krystyna could run to get on line. You see, when it came to rations, you either got there, and got yours, fast...or you went without!

(During this speech, RENATA is putting the baby down in his crib. She tucks him in, and then lies down on the couch.)

(Lights dim very low.)

(A figure, LECH, enters from the hall into the darkened apartment. He walks across the room toward the bedroom. RENATA sits up on the couch, tense. She turns on the light.)

LECH
Turn off that light. You'll waken Krystyna.

(She does. He makes his way in the blackness, but "stumbles", and falls onto the sofa and onto Renata.)

Oops!

RENATA
Mr. Celka!

(LECH makes no move to get up.)

Are you drunk?

LECH

No.

RENATA
Then get your hand off my leg.

LECH
Oh, come now! You mean to say you're not the least bit curious?

RENATA
Actually, Mr. Celka. I'm not.

LECH
Well, I am.

(He begins to trace the outline of her face. He kisses her. RENATA steels herself to his advances. He starts to unbutton her blouse.)

RENATA
No! Not in her house!

(LECH ignores her, persisting.)

(RENATA pushes him away.)

Mr. Celka! No!

(He grabs her, and tries to force her down on the sofa. She struggles.)

Get off me!

(She gets away from him. She reaches down and picks up an ashtray from the table. She brandishes the ashtray like a weapon.)

RENATA
You get away from me!

LECH
Don't be stupid.

RENATA
I'll...tell your wife.

LECH
Tell her what? That I'm human? Hardly "news".

(RENATA moves toward the apartment door, still holding the ashtray to defend herself.)

RENATA
(Threatening) I'll scream! I'll run into the hall, and you'll get arrested for fraternizing.

LECH
You'd do that wouldn't you. To spite yourself! (Pause) O.K. Forget it. You're too bony, anyway.

(LECH goes into the bedroom and shuts the door. RENATA goes back to the sofa and sits, but she is unable to sleep.)

(In the bedroom, LECH begins to undress. He curses under his breath.)

Krystyna?

(KRYSTYNA stirs.)

Krystyna, wake up.

KRYSTYNA
(Very sleepy) Why? What's the matter?

LECH
This can't continue! Five weeks, already. and that parasite is still taking up space in my living room!

KRYSTYNA
Lech, please! Come to bed.

LECH
I can't think of one good reason to keep that woman in this household any longer. She has to go. Now!

KRYSTYNA
Now? It's the middle of the night!

LECH
I don't care.

KRYSTYNA
What kind of Christian charity...

LECH
That's no Christian in my living room.

(KRYSTYNA begins to laugh at his remark.)

Stop it! I won't have you laughing at me!

KRYSTYNA

(In spite of herself) I'm not...

LECH
And laughing at what, I ask you?

KRYSTYNA
(A little fearful) At nothing.

LECH
That's right. At nothing.

KRYSTYNA
But, if you turn her out now, you'll be a traitor! Lech...you know you reap what you sow.

LECH
Why should I stick my neck out more? Especially when things are so ...desperate out there!

KRYSTYNA
If that's true, how can <u>anyone</u> turn anybody away?

LECH
Not "anybody". Just her.

KRYSTYNA
Where's your human decency?

LECH
Still there. For <u>humans.</u>

KRYSTYNA
Lech, if you only got to know her a little better...as I have.

LECH
What's gotten into you?

KRYSTYNA
Nothing. It's just that Renata's been so...helpful. And...

LECH
There's more?

KRYSTYNA
And, I guess, I've gotten...used to her.

LECH
(Sotto) Damn it, Krystyna, you know how I feel. Her kind are vermin.

KRYSTYNA
You have to be so ugly?

LECH
I am what I am.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) Listen, Darling...Kochanie, you know I'm not particularly fond of "them", either. But, well, Renata's...somehow "different".

LECH
Not so different she won't get found out. And then she'll take us down...right along with her!

KRYSTYNA
No, she won't. Get found out, that is. I mean, we're taking all the precautions. No shoes. No flushing the W.C...

LECH
Krystyna, it's just a matter of time.

KRYSTYNA
But Kochanie, all she does is sit on the sofa, sewing. For us. Or, if I want to take a nap, she'll clean and polish...

LECH
Krystyna, this is not a matter for discussion! I want her out. And I want her out, now! (Pause) Only, I swear, she's Marek's problem. Not mine. And why the Hell he doesn't just dispose of her...

KRYSTYNA
That's repulsive.

LECH
Woman, I didn't create what's going on out there.

KRYSTYNA
I don't understand.

LECH
In the real world?

KRYSTYNA
People are...disposing...?

LECH
(Reluctantly) Every time I drive my truck past the forests, I hear the sound of gunfire. Morning, noon... even into the night.

KRYSTYNA
(Aghast) Oh, but surely you can't mean...

LECH
Mostly it's the Germans. The Order Police...not our people. At

least, our police don't participate "officially"...according to Marek. But who knows what's the truth anymore.

KRYSTYNA

Mother of God!

(LECH turns away from her.)

(At a loss) But how can this be? How can the Lord, Jesus, who died for our sins...

LECH

Krystyna!

KRYSTYNA

I mean, wasn't our Lord, himself, a Jew...and the Apostles?

LECH

Krystyna, you're babbling!

KRYSTYNA

Unless, Jesus, in His mercy, is trying to reveal something <u>else</u> to us. To teach us something. Here. Now.

LECH

The only lesson to be learned "here" and "now", is that woman is a danger to this family. And the truth is, I'd be no husband to you, or father to Aleksander, if I allowed this...condition to continue.

KRYSTYNA

No. That's wrong. Lech, I'm sure that Jesus sent Renata to us...for some purpose <u>higher</u> than just to make me laugh.

LECH

Laugh? That's all you...?

KRYSTYNA

I'm sure of it! This whole thing is about our survival!

LECH

Finally! Something's gotten through!

KRYSTYNA

The survival of our souls!

LECH

Krystyna! This is not about salvation!

KRYSTYNA

It is, too! Your's. Mine. Poland's...!

LECH

This is not about theology...?

KRYSTYNA
And that's why we can't let that woman leave this house.

LECH
After I just explained...?

KRYSTYNA
Especially after what you've explained. She could get hurt. All someone has to do is see her leaving this building...

LECH
I don't believe my ears! You're taking her part, instead of mine? You're placing your loyalty to that piece of filth...

KRYSTYNA
She's not dirty.

LECH
...Your loyalty to a parasite over your loyalty to me?

KRYSTYNA
She cleans herself every day.

LECH
Unbelievable! A wife willing to risk not only her own, but her husband and her baby's lives!

KRYSTYNA
Lech...to save our very souls! Can't you understand that? Can't you feel the "rightness" in what I'm saying?

LECH
No. I have no feeling for this nonsense what-so-ever!

KRYSTYNA
You're...joking, aren't you.

LECH
Not at all.

KRYSTYNA
Dear God! Please don't say that. Don't say such a thing to me.

LECH
I'll say what I please!

KRYSTYNA
This is not a good time to argue. My nose has been itching...and earlier, I knocked a picture over...

LECH
Krystyna! Enough with your superstitions!

KRYSTYNA
But...

LECH
I don't want to hear from them! Not from bent pins, or magic circles, or those infernal paper cuts you hang everyplace imaginable!

KRYSTYNA
But paper cuts are pretty.

(LECH gets out of bed, and begins to dress.)

What...are you doing?

LECH
What does it look like?

KRYSTYNA
Lech, it's the middle of the night!

LECH
How did I ever think I could take the country out of <u>you!</u>

KRYSTYNA
Lech!

LECH
And as if that isn't bad enough, now, you don't even respect my wishes!

KRYSTYNA
That's not fair.

LECH
I don't really care anymore. So I sure as Hell don't care to stay under the same roof with a wife who thinks more highly of her garbage than she does of her husband!

KRYSTYNA
Stop twisting things! You always twist!

LECH
And I'll tell you something else, Krystyna. I am not coming back. Period. Not so long as you insist on harboring that...that...!

KRYSTYNA
Lech! The neighbors!

LECH
The Hell with the neighbors! Your choice, Krystyna. Her or me. Make it, and make it now.

KRYSTYNA
I'm sorry, Lech. I just can't do what you're asking. I can't have that on my conscience.

(LECH starts for the door.)

Kochanie! It's after curfew!

LECH
To Hell with curfew!

(He exits.)

KRYSTYNA
I really don't know you anymore.

(RENATA sees what has happened. She puts on her coat and comes to the bedroom door.)

RENATA
Krystyna? I never, ever intended to make a problem between you and your husband.

KRYSTYNA
You haven't.

RENATA
I...I think it best I leave, too.

KRYSTYNA
Why?

RENATA
Because...Mr. Celka...made a pass at me. Which I passed up. I suspect that's as much behind his foul humor as anything. (Pause) I'm sorry, Krystyna. I truly am.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) Thank you, Renata, for your honesty.

RENATA
So, you see why I have to go.

KRYSTYNA
You're decent. You're a decent human being.

RENATA
So, it's “goodbye”.

KRYSTYNA
Renata, I...I want you to stay.

RENATA
But I bring danger. And with the state Mr. Celka's in...

KRYSTYNA
But I need you. Especially now...or I won't have anyone to laugh with.

RENATA
A point. Not a very valid one...but a point.

KRYSTYNA
(Serious) You heard Lech, back in the bedroom, didn't you?

(RENATA nods "yes".)

Well, I heard it, too. Even the part I didn't want to hear. And that's when this "understanding" came over me. (Pause) Some of you Jews are going to survive. And you are going to be one of them.

RENATA
Me? Why me?

KRYSTYNA
Because someone has to bear witness...not just for the souls of your people, but for the souls of mine as well. (Pause) Now, this may sound selfish, and may God forgive me that...but you have to testify. To tell what happened...to let people know that there were Poles who did care, and who were willing to help. Otherwise, we're going to be damned. Forever.

RENATA
I...don't know what to say.

KRYSTYNA
Just that you'll stay. Please?

RENATA
And if Mr. Celka comes back?

(KRYSTYNA gets out of bed, puts on a robe and goes into the living room. She chains the apartment front door. RENATA follows.)

KRYSTYNA
He won't. He'll stay with his friends...or with his latest flame, until I recant. He's done this before. (Pause) Only this time, I won't apologize. Not to him. Not to anyone.

RENATA
You're a strange woman, Krystyna Celka. And a brave one.

KRYSTYNA
More like a fool. I just threw my husband out. And after curfew!

RENATA
That wasn't exactly the way things happened.

KRYSTYNA
For a year now, I've been telling myself that man was just acting the fool. Only tonight, while he was carrying on, I realized something! That fool wasn't acting!

RENATA
(Laughing) You said that. I didn't!

KRYSTYNA
Oh, God! For the first time in too long, I feel so relieved! Almost giddy! Oh, God! And terrified! Holy Mother! How am I ever going to manage?

RENATA
I can help you...if you'll let me.

(KRYSTYNA crosses to the shrine in the living room, and lights a candle.)

KRYSTYNA
Holy Mother, look down upon this, Thy servant...!

RENATA
Krystyna, I have certain practical experience. In things you don't.

KRYSTYNA
Good for nothing experience! <u>You</u> can't even go outside.

RENATA
I can tell you what I do know, so you can be more comfortable, more confident for when you have to deal out there. And I can watch Aleksander, for even longer stretches...to free up your time.

KRYSTYNA
But how can I leave you here, by yourself? I mean, if someone comes to the door...

RENATA
I don't answer it.

KRYSTYNA
If the baby makes noise, you have to. And then what do you say?

RENATA
You tell me. I'm a quick study. I'm also very poised.

KRYSTYNA
Poised?

RENATA
As in having this remarkable ability to be inconspicuously ...ill at ease.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) Well, it's not as though you look all that Jewish. And Marek is still helping us with the important things.

RENATA
That's right.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) But to teach you catechism...

RENATA
Just enough to pass.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) All right, we can try. I'll teach you. And you'll teach me. And together, we'll get through this...with God's help.

RENATA
And with His blessing!

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) Pray with me?

RENATA
Here? Now?

(KRYSTYNA kneels, and motions for RENATA to follow.)

KRYSTYNA
Lesson one. "Our Father, who art in Heaven..." Say it.

RENATA
"Our Father, who art in Heaven...

KRYSTYNA
"Hallowed be Thy Name."

(They pray as lights fade to black.)

(End of Act One.)

(Act Two. Scene One. Two months later. The apartment.)

(RENATA is sitting on the sofa, sewing.)

(OLD RENATA enters and addresses the audience.)

OLD RENATA

Welcome back! It's one, maybe two months later. You tend to lose track of time, when you find yourself existing only from one fear to the next. Always worrying...would our building be invaded, without reason? Our apartment searched...without warning? Our constant comfort remained the good Sergeant, and his lifeline of supplies. (Pause) Mr. Celka never came back, although I know he and Krystyna talked on the phone occasionally. And he did send money for Aleksander's support. Not for Krystyna's, but her son seemed to be another story.

(KRYSTYNA enters pushing the baby carriage. As she enters the apartment, RENATA dives to hide behind the sofa.)

(In a state of shock, KRYSTYNA sits on the sofa, and begins to say a rosary. RENATA comes out of hiding.)

RENATA

Krystyna? What's the matter? Krystyna?

(KRYSTYNA puts the beads down, and begins to tremble. RENATA takes the baby from the carriage, and puts him down in the crib. She then sits beside KRYSTYNA, comforting her.)

Please! Calm down. Calm down, and take it easy! Look, whatever it was...you're here now, and you're safe, and...

KRYSTYNA

No! None of us are safe. Never again!

RENATA

What in the world...?

KRYSTYNA

I...I saw him.

RENATA

Who?

KRYSTYNA
Marek.

RENATA
So?

KRYSTYNA
He's dead.

RENATA
What!

KRYSTYNA
All these people were standing out on the sidewalk. Looking up.

RENATA
(Hesitant) At what?

KRYSTYNA
Bodies. Hanging from a balcony.

RENATA
Dear God!

KRYSTYNA
Twenty two of them...like so many socks on a clothesline.

RENATA
Polish or German?

KRYSTYNA
Our Freedom fighters. And Marek right in the middle. (Pause) It's the end, Renata. I tell you, we're done for.

RENATA
Pull yourself together.

KRYSTYNA
Why bother? Without Marek, we've nothing. No money, no rations. No protection!

RENATA
We'll manage. We'll have to...that's all there is to it.

KRYSTYNA
I'm cold...

RENATA
Here, wrap this blanket...

KRYSTYNA
Cold...and hot. All at the same time.

RENATA
(Feeling her forehead) And no wonder! You're burning up!

KRYSTYNA
Blessed Virgin, how did I ever think we could survive?

RENATA
How long have you been sick?

KRYSTYNA
Maybe there's some penance...

RENATA
Starch but no soap, polish, but no shoes...an egg, but no butter. Isn't that penance enough?

KRYSTYNA
My head aches!

RENATA
(Steering her to the bedroom) Krystyna, for Aleksander's sake, if not for your own, lie down, and let me take care of you.

KRYSTYNA
All right. Only first, get me the flat stone from the dresser...

RENATA
In a minute. You need help getting out of your street clothes?

KRYSTYNA
No.

RENATA
(Giving her the stone) Here you are. (Pause) Seriously, how long have you been running a fever?

(KRYSTYNA begins to rub the stone in "magic circles" on her forehead.)

KRYSTYNA
I'm not sure. I woke up feeling a little funny...but I was certain a walk in the fresh air would take care of everything.

RENATA
It's always something! So, how to bring this temperature down? I've got it! Compresses!

(She goes into the kitchen area to the sink.)

(The baby starts to cry. KRYSTYNA struggles to get out of bed. RENATA reappears.)

Krystyna! Where do you think you're going?

KRYSTYNA
My baby's crying.

RENATA
No! You lie down before you fall down! I'll check on him.

KRYSTYNA
But...!

RENATA
Will you be reasonable? The last thing we need is for anyone else around here to come down sick!

(RENATA looks in on the baby.)

He just got a little tangled in his blanket. He's fine. Aren't you fine, Aleksander?

KRYSTYNA
You're sure?

RENATA
He's perfect. Now get into your bed!

(KRYSTYNA does as she is told. Focus shifts to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
But, despite cold compresses, and the even colder tub baths, the fever didn't break. Not that day, nor the next. Nor the day after that.

RENATA
Krystyna, we're going to have to ask Captain Sendlack to help us out. You need a doctor.

KRYSTYNA
No! I won't have that busybody involved! Not in anything!

RENATA
Then...

(RENATA puts on her coat.)

KRYSTYNA
Where...where do you think you're going?

RENATA
Out. For medicine.

KRYSTYNA
But...

RENATA
Don't discourage me. That rubbing stone to the contrary, you are not getting any better.

KRYSTYNA
But you'll get caught.

RENATA
There's no choice. You need aspirin powder, and I'm sick of trying to practice medicine without...medicine. Listen, Marek used to talk about a black market. Someplace called Kerceli?

KRYSTYNA
You know how to get there?

RENATA
No. But I'll find it! There was a street map in your bookcase.

KRYSTYNA
You can't walk around outside carrying a map!

RENATA
(Tapping her head) The map's in here. Memorized.

KRYSTYNA
Even if you <u>can</u> find your way, Miss Know-It-All...what will you use for money? Those peddlers who run the kiosks in Kerceli are worse thieves than...than the people who had the stalls before.

RENATA
Krystyna, now you listen to me, and you listen good. I'm taking cash from the cupboard.

KRYSTYNA
My household money?

RENATA
Your aspirin money.

KRYSTYNA
Don't you dare use that cash!

RENATA
I'm not stealing it, for God's sake! And if you weren't being so stubborn...!

KRYSTYNA
Me, stubborn? You're the mule!

RENATA
Better a mule than an ostrich!

KRYSTYNA
I am too sick, and too tired to deal with this!

RENATA
Good. Then shut up, and go to sleep. And let me handle things!

KRYSTYNA
(Sullen) There's not enough money in the jar to buy beans.

RENATA
There will be if I add something extra to the pot. Like a kernel or two of nutmeg from your spice rack?

KRYSTYNA
You'd barter?

RENATA
Barter. Bargain. Whatever it takes.

KRYSTYNA
No! You can't do either!

RENATA
Says who?

KRYSTYNA
You'll get found out.

RENATA
Nonsense.

KRYSTYNA
No. True. Renata, you have a style about you...especially when you get excited. And it's, well...it's just not Polish.

RENATA
Oh. (Pause) I...wasn't aware. (Pause) All right, then. <u>You</u> help me come up with a better idea.

KRYSTYNA
I can't.

(Exhausted, KRYSTYNA slides back down in bed.)

RENATA
So maybe Kerceli isn't the best way to go. So, where else in town would have medicine? There's pharmacies...no. Private clinics ...mostly closed. Public hospitals...but no way would they sell

anything. Private hospitals...church hospitals...churches! Say, do parish churches have access to medical supplies?

KRYSTYNA
Yes, but...

RENATA
Then, there we have it!

KRYSTYNA
That's crazy!

RENATA
How can they refuse? I'll say it's for a parishioner!

KRYSTYNA
Now, wait a minute! Just because you can say the "Our Father", and the rosary, there is no way...

RENATA
Krystyna, I'm not going out there for my health!

(RENATA removes her wig.)

KRYSTYNA
Finally! You're taking that silly wig off!

RENATA
My wig's not silly.

KRYSTYNA
It is when you wear it all the time!

RENATA
I've told you before. I'm married, and all married women wear sheitel. That's how it is.

KRYSTYNA
Foolishness!

RENATA
I...have to wear it. So my hair doesn't distract.

KRYSTYNA
Who?

RENATA
The men?

KRYSTYNA
I hardly think Aleksander counts...

RENATA
What can I say? I keep my underwear mended, too...just in case I'm in an accident, and wind up in the hospital!

(She looks at herself in the mirror, and fools with her hair.)

God! It's all still so short. So uneven! I'm going to need some of your bobby pins...to make it stay put.

KRYSTYNA
You know, your hair color always amazes me.

RENATA
Why?

KRYSTYNA
Because it's the same as mine.

RENATA
So? That means we're related?

(She finishes pinning back her hair.)

There. How do I look?

KRYSTYNA
You need a hat. Get my brown one...from the closet.

(RENATA does.)

RENATA
Better?

KRYSTYNA
Perfect. Now you look exactly like...like I would.

RENATA
That's what we want!

KRYSTYNA
Only one thing more.(Undoing the cross from around her neck) Here. Take it, kiss it, and then put it on.

RENATA
The kiss is necessary? Absolutely?

KRYSTYNA
Renata, I know what I'm suggesting is offensive to you. But it's how I would do. And so...

RENATA

I know. I know. "If I ever hope to convince anyone of anything..." Only...God forgive me!

(She kisses the cross, and puts it on.)

KRYSTYNA

May he forgive us both!

(End of Scene.)

(Scene Two. The next day.)

(RENATA is welcoming FATHER GREGORY into the apartment.)

RENATA
Father Gregory! How kind of you to stop by.

FATHER GREGORY
It's the least I can do, after all you told me. Is Mrs. Celka any better today?

RENATA
She's sleeping...much more comfortably, thanks to your generosity. A chair?

FATHER GREGORY
Why, thank you.

(They sit.)

RENATA
The fever broke around noon, but she's still exhausted, poor Dear.

FATHER GREGORY
I can imagine.

(The baby begins to cry. RENATA goes to pick him up.)

RENATA
Excuse me a moment? (Gently) Hush, little one, hush! Mama needs all the rest she can get...so let's not wake her, all right?

FATHER GREGORY
This is Aleksander?

RENATA
(Displaying him proudly) It is! (Imitating KRYSTYNA) Isn't that right, Kochanie?

FATHER GREGORY
A strong, healthy soul if I ever saw one.

RENATA
And loud! Especially when he's hungry! You don't mind if I attend to him, do you, Father? I was just about to give him a bottle.

FATHER GREGORY
Please. Carry on.

(She goes into the kitchen with the baby. KRYSTYNA emerges from the bedroom, she is still unsteady from her illness.)

Ah! You must be Mrs. Celka! So nice to see you up and about.

KRYSTYNA
I heard the baby...

RENATA
Krystyna? You know Father Gregory, don't you? From St. Stefan's?

KRYSTYNA
A priest? Why is a priest in my living room?

FATHER GREGORY
For a pastoral visit, my child.

(RENATA returns with the baby. She sits on a chair, and continues to feed him.)

RENATA
Don't you remember? Last night, I told you Father Gregory might stop by. To see if his aspirin powder had taken effect?

KRYSTYNA
I...I don't remember.

RENATA
I'm not a bit surprised. Drifting in and out of consciousness the way you were.

FATHER GREGORY
Mrs. Celka? Why don't you sit. You look awfully unsteady...

KRYSTYNA
Thank you, Father.

(They both sit.)

FATHER GREGORY
I must admit, my child, your face isn't all that familiar.

RENATA
Of course, you've such a large congregation...!

FATHER GREGORY
True. (Pause) Although, these days, there seem to be far fewer filling our pews.

RENATA
The war calls many.

FATHER GREGORY
I refer to those many more left behind.

KRYSTYNA
Mea culpa, Father! I'm one of them! It's just that it's been so hard to get to Mass...with the baby...

FATHER GREGORY
You, my child, have dispensation. As I assured your cousin, Danuta...

KRYSTYNA
My cousin?

RENATA
What else?

KRYSTYNA
Danuta?

RENATA
She's still not herself, Father.

KRYSTYNA
(Understanding what's happening) Of course, I am...myself, that is.

FATHER GREGORY
You know, you two don't look all that related.

RENATA
Oh, but we are. Distant cousins..but cousins, none the less.

KRYSTYNA
You can always tell our family by the hair. The color of the hair, that is. See? It's the same.

FATHER GREGORY
Now that you point it out, Mrs. Celka, I do see the similarity... and the resemblance.

KRYSTYNA
We should be offering you something, Father.

RENATA
Some tea? There's some brewing in the kitchen.

FATHER GREGORY
No, thank you. I was just wanted to stop by, briefly. Keeping watch

over my flock, as it were. But maybe there's something I can offer you, before I have to go? Perhaps you'd like me to confess you?

KRYSTYNA
(Shaken) Confession? (Regaining her composure) No. No, thank you, Father.

FATHER GREGORY
Well, at least, a prayer...for your continued recovery.

(He crosses himself, and the women do the same. KRYSTYNA motions surreptitiously for RENATA to kneel.)

Merciful Jesus, look down upon this mother, Krystyna Celka, and restore her to strength and to your service. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost...Amen.

KRYSTYNA and RENATA
Amen.

KRYSTYNA
Thank you, Father, for your concern.

FATHER GREGORY
My pleasure. Now then...I must be going.

RENATA
Of course.

FATHER GREGORY
Mrs. Celka, if there's any change in your condition,...or if you need the name of a reliable physician...

KRYSTYNA
We'll let you know.

RENATA
Oh, yes! You can be sure of that!

FATHER GREGORY
Can't afford to lose any one of my parishioners. Especially among our devout...as you two ladies so obviously are!

RENATA
You're very kind.

FATHER GREGORY
Well, then...I'll look for you in church this Sunday, Mrs. Nowak?

RENATA
And I'll be there, Father. Unless, of course, my services are

needed here...by my cousin's side.

FATHER GREGORY
(Blessing her) Pax vobiscum.

(FATHER GREGORY exits.)

(RENATA waits a beat at the door, relieved.)

(KRYSTYNA crosses herself, kneels and prays.)

KRYSTYNA
Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us...

RENATA
What's the matter now?

KRYSTYNA
...Lord have mercy upon us.

RENATA
Krystyna?

KRYSTYNA
I've lied! And to a priest!

RENATA
A little fib, maybe.

KRYSTYNA
Renata, St. Stefan's is the largest parish in Warsaw!

RENATA
It is?

KRYSTYNA
At least you could have gone to St. Sofia's. That's where Lech and I belong.

RENATA
Exactly why I gave St. Sofia's such a wide berth! I didn't want to be anyplace where they knew you. Where there'd be questions!

KRYSTYNA
But how am I supposed to talk to that man, if he comes back here for another visit?

RENATA
Simple. You don't talk. You just nod a lot, and smile even more. And pretty soon he'll be convinced that you're brilliant. (To Aleksander) Isn't that right, little one?

(She puts Aleksander down in the cradle.)

(To KRYSTYNA) So, how about some of that tea? For the both of us?

(RENATA goes into the kitchen, and reappears with the tea service.)

KRYSTYNA
Renata? How did you ever get someone as important as Father Gregory to even talk to you?

RENATA
I got inspired. You see, after Mass, we were all standing around in the vestibule...

KRYSTYNA
After Mass? Don't tell me you went through the service!

RENATA
No choice. I was there. It was starting.

KRYSTYNA
And so you...?

RENATA
Followed along. And it was just like you showed me...in the Missal.

KRYSTYNA
And no one remarked?

RENATA
Not a thing. You're a good teacher!

KRYSTYNA
But what about during the sacrament? What did you do when everyone got up to take Communion?

RENATA
What do you think I did?

KRYSTYNA
You didn't...!

RENATA
Krystyna! I had no choice!

KRYSTYNA
Oh, my God! (Crossing herself) You received the sacrament?

RENATA
I didn't <u>want</u> to.

KRYSTYNA
(Flustered) That has to be a mortal sin!

RENATA
"Renata" didn't partake. "Danuta" was the one!

KRYSTYNA
Mother of God, I'm going to burn...! And this is something I can't ever confess!

RENATA
Krystyna, I didn't mean to...

KRYSTYNA
But you did! Blessed Virgin, what have I created?

RENATA
Just a cousin...from Wieliczka. Only listen, while I was sitting in church, I did get this idea. This inspiration.

KRYSTYNA
No! No more inspirations! One of those a day is more than my condition can handle!

RENATA
(Tempting) It's a way to make money. On our own. For ourselves.

KRYSTYNA
I'm not listening!

RENATA
Here's my idea. We make things. To sell.

KRYSTYNA
Like what?

RENATA
Like undergarments?

KRYSTYNA
Underwear!

RENATA
More like slips...and camisoles. They're simple to stitch...and the material is something we have, right here.

KRYSTYNA
Where?

RENATA
Your old bed linens.

KRYSTYNA
That is inspirational!

RENATA
My fashion sense is based on what doesn't scratch.

KRYSTYNA
Something sturdy...washable.

RENATA
And soft.

KRYSTYNA
Soft is good! Only do you really sew well enough?

RENATA
Please! I grew up in a tailor's shop. I've been dressmaking since I was fifteen. Listen, this will be simple. I make...you sell. In Kerceli...where your Polish style of bargaining won't draw the slightest bit of attention!

KRYSTYNA
I certainly have sheets to spare.

RENATA
You could even take Aleksander along with you, every day...for air! We'll fix up a box for the bottom of his carriage...to carry the "stock", plus whatever else you might need...

KRYSTYNA
And you're sure we don't need a license to do this?

RENATA
To sell in Kerceli? With the gonifs?

KRYSTYNA
You're not sure.

RENATA
Krystyna! Nothing's sure, except that we need a way to better care for ourselves, and your little one, than what we've got now!

KRYSTYNA
Fine. (Pause) We'll start right away. There's no reason why I can't be cutting strips...or whatever it is you're going to need while I recuperate.

RENATA
You have the strength?

KRYSTYNA
And the will!

RENATA
Well...all right, then!

(The doorbell rings.)

What the...? What now?

(KRYSTYNA motions her into the bedroom. RENATA hides behind the wardrobe. KRYSTYNA struggles to answer the door. It is CAPTAIN SENDLACK.)

Why, Captain Sendlack!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I ran into Father Gregory in the lobby. He said you were deathly ill.

KRYSTYNA
Well, I have been under the weather...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Then, why are you out of bed...

KRYSTYNA
Because someone had to...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
...when your cousin could be getting the door?

KRYSTYNA
You...know about my cousin.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Of course.

KRYSTYNA
From Father Gregory.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Although I must admit, I was surprised to hear that there was anyone else staying in this apartment with you. I pride myself on knowing the comings and goings inside this building. All of them.

(RENATA appears in the bedroom doorway.)

RENATA
I didn't realize the building had a concierge...or I would have checked myself in with you properly!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'm no concierge!

RENATA
(Cutting him off, as she extends her hand for him to kiss) I'm Mrs. Nowak. Mrs. Celka's cousin. As you've, apparently, been informed.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Kissing her hand) Captain Sendlack, Ma'am. At your service.

RENATA
(Continuing on) I've only just arrived yesterday...to nurse my poor cousin back to health. And, of course to help care for Aleksander.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Mrs. Celka's indeed fortunate. That you can even take the time...

RENATA
What kind of "family" would we be, if I weren't willing to take such time?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Embarrassed) Of course.

RENATA
Only Krystyna, darling, the Captain is right! Just because you're feeling a little better is no reason to be up and about the minute my back is turned. You belong in your bed. As you were.

(She ushers her into the bedroom.)

KRYSTYNA
Don't get cocky, Renata!

RENATA
"Danuta". The name is Danuta. Nowak.

(RENATA returns to the living room.)

You'll forgive my bad manners, but she really should get some rest.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I understand. Too much excitement...

RENATA
Especially in her weakened condition.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Well...glad to have met you, "Mrs. Nowak" was it?

RENATA
I'm sure we'll have the opportunity to chat on many other occasions.

(She opens the door for CAPTAIN SENDLACK.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'm just down stairs, if you need anything.

RENATA
I'll remember that, Captain. And my cousin and I do thank you. For your concern.

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK exits.)

(End of Scene.)

(Scene Three. A few weeks later. The apartment.)

OLD RENATA
Krystyna managed to "recuperate" for about ten days, and in that manner, we spared ourselves the Captain's extended visitations. And, the more her strength returned, the more Krystyna got into the idea of making a "go" of our enterprise.

(RENATA is tending a pot of soup. KRYSTYNA, carrying whole cloth with patterns pinned to it, enters from the bedroom.)

KRYSTYNA
I need to use this table to cut out panels. I tell you, that bedroom is so stock piled with...stock, there's no place left to spread things flat.

(She lays the yard goods on the table, and begins to cut. She smells the soup cooking.)

Um. Smells good.

RENATA
I hope so. I threw in some very expensive sorrel this time...along with the turnips.

(KRYSTYNA tastes the broth, and makes a face. RENATA, continuing to stir the pot, goes off in her own reverie.)

You know, to remember Pharaoh, who wanted to destroy my people, we celebrate Passover and eat matzo.

KRYSTYNA
So?

RENATA
And to remember Haman, and his plan to wipe the Jews out of Persia, we celebrate Purim and we eat hamentashen.

KRYSTYNA
I don't see what...

RENATA
I wonder what <u>new</u> holiday we'll add, and what we'll eat to celebrate it, once <u>this</u> is all over.

KRYSTYNA
Renata? Renata, I think it's time we expanded the "line".

RENATA
Listen to her! Miss big shot executive!

KRYSTYNA
I want us to make scarves, too.

RENATA
Out of cotton? You're crazy!

KRYSTYNA
No, I'm not. And we'll dye them, so they'll look pretty.

RENATA
Pretty?

KRYSTYNA
Yes! There's this fellow in the market with some dye packets to sell. Indigo Blue! Sunset Orange! Buttercup! A whole case full!

RENATA
Rainbows in a box! Who would have thought...?

KRYSTYNA
He'll let the whole thing go for a good price.

RENATA
Do you have any idea how long it's been since I've seen a rainbow?

KRYSTYNA
Only, if I want them, I have to buy them today. The guy's going to get sent off for labor...unless he can come up with cash under the table. And fast. And the dye packets are all he's left.

RENATA
He's Polish?

KRYSTYNA
That makes no difference. Not anymore.

RENATA
(Skeptical) Colored scarves. You're going to sell pink mufflers to Brown Shirts?

KRYSTYNA
Renata, the way I've come to feel about myself, I can sell ice boxes to polar bears! (Pause) So, what do you say?

RENATA
I say you're getting scary, again!

KRYSTYNA
"Yes", or "no"?.

RENATA
"Yes" to life! How can I say otherwise? His, as well as ours!

KRYSTYNA
Oh, Renata, this is such fun! Keep an eye on Aleksander for me, will you? While I wrap things up?

RENATA
Sure. No problem.

KRYSTYNA
(Hugging RENATA) You are such a blessing!

(KRYSTYNA puts on her coat, and leaves.)

RENATA
You hear that, Aleksander? Now, I'm a blessing? Good Lord, if this keeps up, who knows where it could all lead!

(RENATA picks the baby up, and carries him over to the window. She is obviously enjoying herself. Suddenly, she backs away from the window...frightened.)

Oh, God! The street's crawling with S.S.! Well, if they can't see us, then we don't exist! (To the baby) Right, "shayner punim"? Oh, such a pretty face! So like my little...(Catching herself) So, Aleksander, we can't look outside..but we can still pretend, can't we! We can pretend we see Mama...down there by the corner. And we can wave "bye bye" to her.

(She takes the baby's hand, and waves it.)

"Bye bye", Krystyna. "Bye bye", Mama. (Pause) Ah, zisseleh! Such sweetness, kinna hora! So, is my sweetness ready for a nap?

(She begins to sing the baby a lullaby in Yiddish. {See end of script for music.})

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK comes up the stairs. He stops outside the door, and puts his ear to it to better hear the singing. Then, he knocks, using the door knocker.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Hello? Hello in there! I'm sure someone's home!

RENATA
(To Aleksander) You hear that, little one? That is not the sound of

opportunity knocking!

(She opens the door, still holding Aleksander.)

Why, Captain Sendlack!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Pushing into the apartment) I just got the most distressing mail!

RENATA
(After the fact) Come in.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
My pension's been cut off! Just like that...without so much as a "by your leave"!

RENATA
Surely it's not your only source of income.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I tell you, this is no way to treat a veteran! An officer! With a command under...My, my, my! What are you cooking?

RENATA
Soup.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Smells...interesting.

RENATA
(Reluctantly) It's the sorrel. Not quite ready, yet...but if you'd like a taste...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'd be delighted! Can I hold the baby for you...while you get out a bowl?

RENATA
(Amused by his audacity) You must be hungry, indeed.

(He sits at the table. She brings him a bowl of soup. She takes the baby back.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Unusual.

RENATA
It's just a variation on "shav".

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Shav? That's Jewish soup, isn't it?

RENATA
Actually, "shav" is Russian.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
And you cook a lot of "Russian" dishes where you come from.

RENATA
Yes. In Wieliczka.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You don't sound like you're from that part of the country.

RENATA
I don't?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
No. And, you see, I do know people from there. My dear departed Gloria's family have a salt mine, near Slawina. You don't speak with the same accent.

RENATA
It's a big province.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Not really.

RENATA
Oh, but of course, I wasn't born there. I just moved there, after I married. Originally I'm from...Baniocha. Just like my cousin.

(RENATA sets the baby down in the crib, and spends time tucking him in. CAPTAIN SENDLACK looks after her, then continues to eat.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Shav, you say. I'll have to remember that. (Pause) So, tell me, Mrs. Nowak, are you ever planning to return to your own home? To Mr. Nowak?

RENATA
Probably not. My husband died last winter. Prematurely.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'm...sorry.

RENATA
Else why would I have been so free for so long? So able to help Krystyna?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Why else, indeed?

RENATA
Sleep tight, little one. (turning back to CAPTAIN SENDLACK) If the truth be known, I've rather grown to like Warsaw.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Although it's an expensive city. (Pause) May I ask how you're supporting yourself?

RENATA
What kind of question...?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
It's been months, already, Mrs. Nowak, and you don't strike me as a particularly wealthy woman.

RENATA
Your meaning, Captain?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I know you haven't received mail the entire time you've been here. From Wieliczka, or from anywhere else, for that matter! So, it stands to reason that there has been no infusion of money, or additional ration coupons for buying sorrel...much less anything else.

RENATA
Nothing gets by you, does it?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Very little, Mrs. Nowak. Now then, maybe it would be best if you confide in this dottering, and world-weary pensioner...who is suddenly finding himself without a zloty in the world. Or I just may be forced to confide in the authorities, that there's a person of suspicious origin living in this building.

RENATA
Suspicious...!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Well, you have to admit, whatever's going on in here can only be construed as...fishy. (Pause) So, tell me...how are you doing it, Mrs. Nowak? Generating money, that is.

RENATA
(Giving in) Honest wages for honest work. I sew garments, and Krystyna sells them.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You're running a business out of a residence? I'm sure you don't have a license to do that, now do you?

RENATA
Actually, there's one applied for.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Very good, Mrs. Nowak! (Pointedly) But will that application stand up to scrutiny? Or to a challenge?

RENATA
Captain, what exactly is it that you want?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Like you, to survive.

RENATA
Even if I wanted to include you...I'm afraid I couldn't. You see, we're practically out of yard goods. And that means we're already taking on additional overhead.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You know what bothers me about this whole conversation, Mrs. Nowak? It's your business instincts. They're too good for a Polish woman.

RENATA
My instincts are what they are. And I thank the Blessed Virgin that, so far, they've been good enough to keep vegetables in our soup pot.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Don't blaspheme, Mrs. Nowak.

RENATA
I don't know what you're implying.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I think you do. I heard you singing.

RENATA
A folk tune.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Not of any folk I know!

RENATA
A folk song is a folk song.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Mrs. Nowak, I can turn a deaf ear, if you'll just do a little something to help <u>me</u> out.

RENATA
(Sarcastic) Like how?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You say you're short on materials? Well, I can supply them! My dear departed Gloria was quite the fashion plate in her time. She had closets full of expensive dresses. Silks...wools ...quality stuff.

RENATA
Which you still have?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I've never been able to part with her things.

RENATA
But you'd part their company, now.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
For appropriate consideration.

RENATA
For a piece of the action.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I wouldn't have phrased it that way, but...

RENATA
Well...we can use a supplier. And, if those yard goods are what you say...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
They are!

RENATA
Only I'll have to see what we're talking about, first. The condition of the garments...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Naturally!

RENATA
And, of course, I need to talk the whole matter over with Krystyna.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Come to my apartment. I'll show you what's in the closets.

RENATA
I can't...now. The baby's asleep.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You're a strange one, Mrs. Nowak. That child isn't even yours.

RENATA
That makes no difference. (Pause) But, I tell you what. As soon as Krystyna comes home, I'll come down and have a look.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Fine. I'll expect you, as soon as Mrs. Celka returns.

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK bows with a flourish, and exits.)

(Focus shifts to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
And so it happened that, overnight, our joint venture became a co-operative affair. Both Krystyna and I agreed that we dared not risk otherwise. And business thrived, especially as Captain Sendlack began to consider his old draperies, slipcovers, and all other manner of household things to be fair game for the enterprise. (Pause) Captain Sendlack continued to watch me like a hawk. We all knew he knew I wasn't what I pretended...but he seemed happy enough to go along with the charade...as Fall gave way to Winter...and Winter turned into another Spring. And then summer, 1944.

(RENATA is playing with the baby. KRYSTYNA returns.)

KRYSTYNA
I just heard that the Allies have landed! At Normandy!

RENATA
You're sure?

KRYSTYNA
Old Zablinski has a friend...with a radio.

RENATA
Reliable?

KRYSTYNA
He heard it on the BBC!

RENATA
Then it must be...!

KRYSTYNA
That the Brits are on their way! (Picking up the baby, and dancing around with him) You hear that, Kochanie? The Brits are coming! And the Yanks, and the French! We're going to be free!

RENATA
Free? Finally!

(Focus back to OLD RENATA.)

OLD RENATA
Only, by October, it was apparent that the Russian legions were

going to be the ones to liberate Warsaw. Their's were the troops camped not three miles away...on the far side of the Vistula. Their's were the guns booming...theirs were the planes dropping shells with disquieting regularity, on...us.

(The sounds of an air raid in progress...bombs going off, sirens, alarms, etc.)

(KRYSTYNA grabs RENATA pushes her under the dining room table.)

KRYSTYNA
Renata! Get under here, before you get yourself killed!

(The women cower under the table.)

RENATA
German?

KRYSTYNA
No, Russian. Flying from east to west.

RENATA
Sounded like they were coming from the park, to me.

KRYSTYNA
From the river!

RENATA
From the park!

KRYSTYNA
The river!

RENATA
Does it really matter? Shouldn't we only care that they're coming awfully close?

KRYSTYNA
All night long...and now almost every day, too! I can't take much more of this, I tell you!

(The bombing stops. The "all clear" signal sounds.)

RENATA
"All clear".

KRYSTYNA
Renata, we have to get out of here.

RENATA
No! We stay put...we live.

KRYSTYNA
This isn't "living"! Half the time, we've no electricity...no clean water to drink...

RENATA
At least we've a roof over our heads.

KRYSTYNA
But for how long? Any one of those shells falls into this living room, and we don't even have that!

RENATA
What about the Home Army? Aren't you the one always says "trust our Freedom Fighters to prevail?"

KRYSTYNA
Aren't you the one always says, "trust in God. All others pay cash?"

RENATA
You know that once the Russians cross the river, once they've joined us in our fight...

KRYSTYNA
Now who's being the ostrich? The Reds won't join us in anything! Not 'til <u>after</u> our Home Army and the Germans have wiped each other out! That's when Russians cross rivers...to lay claim to what's left!

RENATA
If you're doing this is to demoralize me, you're succeeding!

KRYSTYNA
Renata, we have to take our chances, now...with the devil we already know. And while we still have enough cash left to try!

RENATA
But...

KRYSTYNA
No "but"s. My mind's made up.

RENATA
Well, mine's not.

KRYSTYNA
This is no time to be contrary! We have to get out of Warsaw!

RENATA

To go where?

KRYSTYNA
To Baniocha? To my parent's home. I'm sure I can find someone with a truck who'll take us...

RENATA
Look, it's one thing for me to make my way, discretely, around this neighborhood. But to go wandering around in the countryside... No!

KRYSTYNA
You'll be fine! We'll bandage your face, and you'll look like all the other war-ravaged.

RENATA
You're meshuggah!

KRYSTYNA
I don't know what that means.

RENATA
It's not a vote of confidence.

KRYSTYNA
You listen to me, Renata, I trusted you to think for the both of us, all those times when <u>you</u> knew better, didn't I? Well, this time, <u>I'm</u> the one knows what she's doing.

RENATA
It's not that I don't trust you...

KRYSTYNA
Then believe in me! Believe in <u>us!</u>

RENATA
(Terrified) I can't!

KRYSTYNA
Look, we can make it, if we stick together. Deep down in your heart of hearts, you know that to be the truth.

RENATA
God, but I'd like that to be true. I <u>wish</u> it to be true.

KRYSTYNA
It <u>will</u> be true! I promise.

(KRYSTYNA hugs RENATA.)

RENATA
All right.

KRYSTYNA
Pack, Renata. And I'll be back as soon as I've hired us a driver.

(RENATA nods agreement. KRYSTYNA puts on her overcoat, and exits.)

(RENATA goes into the bedroom and gets out a suitcase which she fills with KRYSTYNA's clothing. She closes the suitcase, takes it into the other part of the apartment. Next she begins to lay out Aleksander's things.)

(During this action, the audience sees KRYSTYNA descend the stairs, and go out the front door. CAPTAIN SENDLACK also notices KRYSTYNA pass. He follows her outside, and watches as she exits the stage.)

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK goes back inside, but instead of returning to his apartment, he decides to pay a visit to RENATA.)

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK rings the doorbell.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Mrs. Nowak? Mrs. Nowak, I have a matter of the utmost urgency!

(RENATA shoves the suitcase under the sofa.)

RENATA
(Calling through the closed door) Captain, this is really not a good time...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Please! I have to speak to you. Face to face.

RENATA
(Letting him in) Very well. What is it?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I just saw Mrs. Celka go tearing out of here.

RENATA
So?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
So, what's going on, Mrs. Nowak? Mrs. Celka just went outside. Not a usual pastime to engage in...especially right after an air raid. Not when whole buildings can still be falling down about your ears!

RENATA
She...had an appointment.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
With whom?

RENATA
Captain Sendlack, I'm not my cousin's keeper!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Well, maybe you should be. (Pause) What's Aleksander's clothing doing out?

RENATA
Just some things he's outgrown. Things I was thinking we'd sell... or give away.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
But these fit him perfectly! Just yesterday, he was wearing this very sweater!

RENATA
You're right. This sweater <u>does</u> still fit. My mistake.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
And there's a valise...!

RENATA
Where?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Pushed behind the sofa! (Pause) Now look, Mrs. Nowak, or whatever your real name is. You and Mrs. Celka aren't planning on going anywhere, are you? Because we have a very successful, not to mention profitable business in place. Here. Which I would hate, in any way, to see compromised.

RENATA
I assure you, Captain, Mrs. Celka and I are of the same mind as you. We only want what's best.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Fine. So long as what's best for you, is also best for me.

RENATA
Isn't it always?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Young lady, Do I need to remind you that there is still a bounty being offered on Jews?

RENATA
(Staring him down) What's that to me?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Look, Mrs. Nowak, if Mrs. Celka wants to take the baby and go... fine. Let her. I can always take over her duties, in addition to my own. But you...you have to stay, so our arrangement can continue.

RENATA

And if I don't agree?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Then I'll turn you in. And I'll name Mrs. Celka and the baby right along with you...for aiding and abetting.

RENATA

Swine.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Oh, now there's a name one Pole would never call another!

RENATA

Captain Sendlack, I swear, by all that's holy...!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

You want to swear? Fine. Go ahead.

RENATA

All right.

(She gets out KRYSTYNA's missal, and puts her hand on it.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

No. Not on the missal. On the cross.

(RENATA clutches the cross she is wearing around her neck.)

RENATA

I swear I'm not Jewish. Now are you satisfied?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Oh, very much so, Mrs. Nowak. Satisfied that you're no Catholic, or you would have kissed it first!

RENATA

A lapse. Proves nothing.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Ah, but such an appearance of guilt! And, these days, aren't appearances everything?

RENATA

Captain Sendlack, I implore you!

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Don't implore, Mrs. Nowak. And, for God's sake, stop looking at me with such sad eyes!

RENATA
Please! I'll do whatever you say. Maintain..."whatever" for you.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
In exchange for jeopardizing myself!

RENATA
In exchange for leaving Krystyna and the baby alone.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'll...have to think about this. I'm...not sure, Mrs. Nowak. In the meantime, however...I wouldn't go anywhere. Neither one of you. Or you can forget about any kind of consideration coming from me!

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK exits down the steps. He stops a beat before his apartment, before continuing to exit the building. Outside, on the street, he runs into KRYSTYNA who is returning.)

Mrs. Celka! How...nice to see you!

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK exits. KRYSTYNA looks after him a little surprised. She goes upstairs where RENATA is furiously packing.)

KRYSTYNA
Renata? Captain Sendlack was just acting unusually strange.

RENATA
Did you get the transportation?

KRYSTYNA
Yes! Right here!

(She displays two railroad tickets.)

Train tickets! More expensive, but more reliable...you know, for two women and a child traveling by themselves. So. We have seats on the four o'clock, which leaves plenty of time...

RENATA
No. There's no more time. You have to get out of here at once!

KRYSTYNA
Why? What's the matter?

RENATA

Captain Sendlack.

KRYSTYNA

What about him?

(RENATA closes the suitcase. She begins to dress Aleksander.)

RENATA

He saw you leaving...after the raid. And then he found me packing.

KRYSTYNA

You let him into the apartment? Why?

(RENATA turns away, visibly upset.)

RENATA

Krystyna, just take Aleksander, and get the Hell out of here.

KRYSTYNA

You don't think he's...? Wait a minute. What about you?

RENATA

Don't worry about me.

KRYSTYNA

But you're the one has to get away! You're in far greater danger here than I am.

RENATA

Krystyna, take your baby out for air, and stay out. And catch that four o'clock train. Alone.

KRYSTYNA

No. I'm not leaving without you.

RENATA

Look, Sendlack wants me, not you. The price is on my head. So stop arguing, and help me stuff whatever we can into the bottom of Aleksander's carriage. I won't have him collecting "three for one"!

(CAPTAIN SENDLACK enters on street level in the company of the ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT. They enter the building and go up the steps to the apartment.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

Most fortuitous to find you on patrol, Sir! I tell you, the woman inside this apartment is very odd, indeed! Except for the lady of the house, no one seems to know her...or where she came from... or who any of her people are!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
All right. We'll see what this is all about. (Pounding on the door) Open up in there! German Order Police! Open up, I say!

KRYSTYNA
Mother of God! He has betrayed us!

(KRYSTYNA grabs up her baby. RENATA goes to open the door. The men come into the apartment.)

RENATA
Officer? What...can we do for you?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Overlapping) She's the one! The one I was talking about!

KRYSTYNA
Captain Sendlack! What could possibly be promoting such an outburst?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
(Pointing at RENATA) Jew! (Pointing at KRYSTYNA) And Jew lover!

KRYSTYNA
Have you taken leave of your senses? You know this is my cousin. Danuta Nowak. From Wieliczka. Danuta, show the officer your kennkarte, so we can put an end to this foolishness!

(RENATA gets her pocketbook, and produces the card, and hands it to ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT.)

You'd like to see mine, too, officer?

(She hands ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT her card.)

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
This picture doesn't do you justice, Ma'am.

KRYSTYNA
(Forcing herself to play the coquette) Why, thank you, Captain.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Lieutenant, Ma'am. Just a Lieutenant.

(He smiles at her. KRYSTYNA forces herself to smile back.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Officer! I'm making a serious charge!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT

(Innocent) Which I'm investigating. (Pause) So...this apartment is registered in whose name?

KRYSTYNA
Mine. Rather, in my husband's.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
"Mrs. Celka" is it?

KRYSTYNA
Yes, sir.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Please, Mrs. Celka, don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you. God knows, there's already been enough of that...

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Lieutenant!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
(Pulling himself together) So...where is he? Your husband, that is.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
He abandoned her. Like any man would, whose wife whores behind his back!

KRYSTYNA
Liar!

(She moves to slap CAPTAIN SENDLACK, but the ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT restrains her.)

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Ma'am!

KRYSTYNA
Let me go!

(He does.)

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Please try to believe, Ma'am. I don't wish you any harm.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
What's this?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
(To KRYSTYNA) My nerves are shot, I'm tired, and all I want is to finish out my tour, and get back to Bremerhaven. To my home.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
This is preposterous!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
(Regaining control of himself) Ma'am? Where, exactly, is Mr. Celka?

KRYSTYNA
I don't know. My husband has been...out. For over a year now.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
There's a suitcase open. You were going somewhere?

KRYSTYNA
Yes, actually, we were. To Germany.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
What?

KRYSTYNA
We heard there are jobs there. For healthy women willing to work.

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
That's true, but I don't think they're very good jobs. At least, that's how I understand.

KRYSTYNA
Any job would be good, if it brings in enough to feed my baby.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Officer, I brought you up here to make an arrest. Not to indulge in a tea party!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
There's nothing here to condemn anyone.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You haven't even looked!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
I've seen all I need to.

(He salutes the women, and starts to leave.)

Ladies?

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
I'm...reporting you to your superiors!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Sir, I'm a reserve volunteer. I'm not Gestapo.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
But you still serve the Reich, don't you?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT

Of course.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Then serve your country! And serve it according to your commander's posted policy! Someone turns in a Jew, that someone is entitled to ten pounds of sugar and a bottle of vodka!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
(Exasperated, and to RENATA) Ma'am? Are you a Jew?

(RENATA takes hold of the cross around her neck, kisses it, and declares defiantly.)

RENATA
I swear, in the name of...

(The "Angelus" begins to toll. RENATA stops mid-sentence, drops to her knees and begins to pray.)

"And the Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary..."

(KRYSTYNA kneels and joins her.)

KRYSTYNA
"And she conceived by the Holy Ghost."

(The women say "Hail Mary"s.)

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
What the...?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Hush, man! Respect the Angelus.

(The ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT joins KRYSTYNA and RENATA to conclude the "Hail Mary.")

KRYSTYNA
You're Catholic?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
I'm...truly sorry for the intrusion.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
Officer! What about my reward?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
There's been no crime committed! Now then, Sir, step aside. I have streets in this neighborhood that need safeguarding.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK

But I insist...!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
The answer's "no"! (Pause) And if you persist in your accusation, I'll have to run you in...for bringing false charges! That is, if the ladies request I take such an action.

RENATA
No! No. It's all right, Officer. We're not troublemakers..

KRYSTYNA
Now, just wait a minute, Cousin! I'm not so sure I agree with you. I mean, Captain Sendlack is obviously distraught, for whatever his reason. Who knows how many other police he'll bother with his fantasy before he comes to his senses?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
It's up to you, Ma'am.

KRYSTYNA
(Pause) Then I say, "arrest him".

RENATA
Krystyna!

KRYSTYNA
For his own good, Cousin. Captain Sendlack needs time in a cell. Alone. To have a chance to calm down...and to reflect on what pain false witness can cause the innocent.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
This is outrageous! I'm a war hero, Officer. I had a command under Pilsudski!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Ma'am, if you want to press charges, you'll have to come with me to the station house.

KRYSTYNA
Why?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
To swear out a warrant.

KRYSTYNA
Oh. (Pause) You'll need us both?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
No. Just you. "Celka"'s the name on the apartment.

KRYSTYNA
And this paperwork will take long?

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Shouldn't. There's just a few forms...

KRYSTYNA
Fine. Only may I meet you downstairs. Officer? I have some things to tend to...concerning the baby...before...

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Of course. We'll be waiting in front of the building.

CAPTAIN SENDLACK
You can't be serious...!

ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT
Just doing my job, old man. So, move it. Sir?

(ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT exits with CAPTAIN SENDLACK under arrest.)

(KRYSTYNA grabs up the baby and puts him in the carriage.)

KRYSTYNA
Quickly! We haven't a minute to spare! Take Aleksander, and go!

RENATA
But...

KRYSTYNA
I'll meet you under the Kilinski statue in Krasinski Square...as soon as I can finish whatever it is I have to, with the officer.

RENATA
Krystyna, you can't go down to a police station!

KRYSTYNA
It's a formality.

RENATA
You trust "formalities"? There?

KRYSTYNA
Renata, this is our insurance policy! Captain Sendlack can't make more trouble, if he's locked up. That's why we have to make sure he stays that way...at least until after train time.

RENATA
But...

KRYSTYNA
No arguments! Not now...and certainly not between ourselves! (Pause) Here's your ticket.

RENATA
I really don't like this. Something could go wrong...and then what's to become of Aleksander?

KRYSTYNA
You'll take him. And you'll raise him as though he were your own.

RENATA
(Utterly shocked) You're prepared to give up your own son?

KRYSTYNA
Hardly giving him up! I'm entrusting him to the care of a good woman. To you, Renata. To you.

RENATA
Be careful.

KRYSTYNA
I'll see you in the Square.

RENATA
Under the statue.

KRYSTYNA
Yes. Under the statue.

(RENATA touches her on the arm for re-assurance.)

I have to go. There are men downstairs. Waiting.

(KRYSTYNA exits the building. She joins ORDER POLICE LIEUTENANT and CAPTAIN SENDLACK on the street, and the three of them exit. RENATA immediately busies herself packing and getting out of the apartment with the baby.)

(End of Scene.)

(Epilogue.)

OLD RENATA

Krystyna never made it to the statue, or the railroad station. So Aleksander and I went on to Baniocha, alone. Only when we got there, her parents didn't believe my story...or that Aleksander was their grandchild. So, what was left, but to trek back to Warsaw... where we were greeted by a city burned entirely to the ground! Leveled in a German reprisal against the short-lived Polish insurrection. (Pause) I tried to find Krystyna, for years...but nothing. I even made an effort to locate Mr. Celka, but he, too had vanished without a trace.So, Aleksander stayed with me, and he became like my own. And I told him everything. (Pause) I've raised him with truth and with tolerance...and with the church. For his mother, my Polish friend, Krystyna Celka. One in a million. One of the few.

(RENATA looks at the audience a moment. She reverts to being uncomfortable. She exits.)

(Lights fade to black.)

(End of play.)